

The following claims are presented for examination:

1. (Currently Amended) A method ~~for evaluating a password proposed by a user during an enrollment process~~, comprising:
  - receiving ~~[[said]] a~~ proposed password from ~~[[said]] a~~ user;
  - performing an Internet search using a query containing one or more keywords derived from ~~[[said]] the~~ proposed password, ~~wherein said Internet search searches contents of the Internet across a plurality of web sites by~~ using a search engine tool; ~~evaluating results of said search relative to one or more predefined thresholds;~~ and
  - rejecting ~~[[said]] the~~ proposed password ~~when said user is correlated with said proposed password if one or more of said predefined thresholds are exceeded by said results based on the number of web pages retrieved by the search engine tool that contain both the search string and another string that is determined based on a rule for the selection of passwords.~~
2. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein ~~said one or more predefined correlation rules evaluate~~ the rule evaluates whether ~~that said the~~ proposed password can be qualitatively correlated with ~~[[said]] the~~ user.
3. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein ~~said one or more predefined correlation rules evaluate~~ the rule evaluates whether ~~[[said]] the~~ proposed password can be quantitatively correlated with ~~[[said]] the~~ user.
4. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein ~~[[said]] the~~ proposed password is comprised of a proposed answer and a proposed hint and wherein ~~said one or more predefined correlation rules evaluate~~ the rule evaluates whether ~~[[said]] the~~ proposed answer can be correlated with ~~[[said]] the~~ proposed hint in a particular relation.
5. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 4, wherein ~~said particular relation is selected~~ the rule concerns a relation from ~~[[said]] the~~ group consisting essentially of: self, family member, co-author, teammate, colleague, neighbor, community member or household member.
6. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein ~~[[said]] the~~ proposed password is comprised of a proposed answer and a proposed hint and wherein ~~said one or~~

~~more predefined correlation rules evaluate~~ the rule evaluates whether ~~[[said]] the~~ proposed answer can be obtained from ~~[[said]] the~~ proposed hint.

7. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein ~~[[said]] the~~ proposed password is an identifying number.

8. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 7, wherein ~~said one or more predefined correlation rules evaluate~~ the rule evaluates whether ~~[[said]] the~~ identifying number identifies a person in a particular relationship to ~~[[said]] the~~ user.

9. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 7, wherein ~~said one or more predefined correlation rules evaluate~~ the rule evaluates whether ~~[[said]] the~~ identifying number is a top N most commonly used identifying number.

10. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 7, wherein ~~said one or more predefined correlation rules evaluate~~ the rule evaluates whether ~~[[said]] the~~ identifying number identifies a top N commercial entity.

11. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 7, wherein ~~said one or more predefined correlation rules evaluate~~ the rule evaluates whether ~~[[said]] the~~ identifying number identifies ~~[[said]] the~~ user.

12. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 7, wherein ~~[[said]] the~~ identifying number is a portion of a telephone number.

13. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 7, wherein ~~[[said]] the~~ identifying number is a portion of an address.

14. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 7, wherein ~~[[said]] the~~ identifying number is a portion of social security number.

15. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein ~~[[said]] the~~ proposed password is a word.

16. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 15, wherein ~~said one or more predefined correlation rules evaluate whether~~ the rule evaluates a correlation between ~~[[said]] the~~ word and ~~[[said]] the~~ user ~~exceeds a predefined threshold~~.

17. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein ~~said correlation is determined by performing a meta search~~ the search engine is a meta search engine.

18. (Canceled)

19. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the search engine employs local proximity techniques ~~said step of ensuring a correlation further comprises the step of performing a local proximity evaluation.~~

20. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein ~~said step of ensuring a correlation further comprises the step of performing~~ the search engine employs a number classification.

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21. (Currently Amended) An apparatus ~~for evaluating a password proposed by a user during an enrollment process,~~ comprising:

a memory; and

at least one processor, coupled to the memory, operative to:

receive ~~[[said]]~~ a proposed password from ~~[[said]]~~ a user;

perform an Internet search using a query containing one or more keywords derived from ~~[[said]]~~ the proposed password, ~~wherein said Internet search searches contents of the Internet across a plurality of web sites by~~ using a search engine tool; ~~evaluate results of said search relative to one or more predefined thresholds;~~ and

reject ~~[[said]]~~ the proposed password ~~when said user is correlated with said proposed password if one or more of said predefined thresholds are exceeded by said results.~~ based on the number of web pages retrieved by the search engine tool that contain both the search string and another string that is determined based on a rule for the selection of passwords.

22. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 21, wherein ~~said one or more predefined correlation rules evaluate~~ the rule evaluates whether ~~[[said]]~~ the proposed password can be correlated with ~~[[said]]~~ the user.

23. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 21, wherein ~~[[said]]~~ the proposed password is comprised of a proposed answer and a proposed hint and wherein ~~said one or more predefined correlation rules evaluate~~ rule evaluates whether ~~[[said]]~~ the proposed answer can be correlated with ~~[[said]]~~ the proposed hint in a particular relation.

**24.** (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 21, wherein ~~[[said]] the~~ proposed password is comprised of a proposed answer and a proposed hint and wherein ~~said one or more predefined correlation rules evaluate the rule evaluates~~ whether ~~[[said]] the~~ proposed answer can be obtained from ~~[[said]] the~~ proposed hint.

**25.** (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 21, wherein ~~[[said]] the~~ proposed password is an identifying number.

**26.** (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 25, wherein ~~said one or more predefined correlation rules evaluate the rule evaluates~~ whether ~~[[said]] the~~ identifying number identifies a person in a particular relationship to ~~[[said]] the~~ user.

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**27.** (Currently Amended) An article of manufacture for evaluating a password proposed by a user, comprising a machine readable medium containing one or more programs which when executed implement the steps of:

receive ~~[[said]] the~~ proposed password from ~~[[said]] the~~ user; and  
performing an Internet search using a query containing one or more keywords derived from ~~[[said]] the~~ proposed password, ~~wherein said Internet search searches contents of the Internet across a plurality of web sites by~~ using a search engine tool;  
~~evaluating results of said search relative to one or more predefined thresholds;~~ and  
rejecting ~~[[said]] the~~ proposed password ~~when said user is correlated with said proposed password if one or more of said predefined thresholds are exceeded by said results based on the number of web pages retrieved by the search engine tool that contain both the search string and another string that is determined based on a rule for the selection of passwords.~~